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General Assembly

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Fifty-sixth session

76th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 5 December 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Gounaris (Greece), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 108 (*continued*)

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Plenary meetings devoted to volunteering to mark the closing of the International Year of Volunteers

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/288)

Draft resolution (A/56/L.27)

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): The International Year of Volunteers, which has been celebrated this year and the closing of which is marked by this meeting, has given the international community the opportunity better to grasp the important role played by volunteers in shaping the future of humanity, and particularly in the socio-economic progress of developing countries. As an expression of human solidarity, volunteerism extends through the ages. The community spirit that was the strength of our traditional societies was based on nothing other than volunteerism.

Development in solidarity, from which many thinkers have sought to draw development models appropriate to Africa, has essentially been based on volunteerism — that is, helping others to develop in order to help oneself develop. In other words, this form of solidarity should be not merely encouraged; we have to go further by institutionalizing it. That is why we are deeply grateful to the countries and international organizations that have made it an instrument to help mankind flourish and to give the volunteer movement a soul.

In the face of distress, misery and suffering, volunteers, with their receptiveness, enthusiasm and courage, work tirelessly in the field to revive hope. Throughout the world, volunteers are playing an important and effective role in sustainable human development, in such fields as education, health, environment and so on. This movement of benevolence therefore deserves to be better known and appreciated than it currently is. That is why we must support it by promoting public awareness and by financing its activities, since such organizations operate mostly on the basis of voluntary contributions.

It is from that standpoint that we should welcome the seminar convened last October in Dakar on the promotion of volunteerism and sustainable human development in French-speaking Africa. That meeting focused on the results obtained in terms of the targets set for the International Year of Volunteers, the recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteering. The seminar also recommended that all

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local initiatives registered this year be supported and enhanced by an international coalition of representatives of Governments, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, foundations and the private sector in coordination with the United Nations Volunteers programme.

In Burkina Faso, volunteers have been working in almost every sector of economic and social activity, particularly in rural areas, along with the local populations whom they assist in combating poverty. While experiencing the harsh daily realities of the people, volunteers contribute their experience in undertaking many development operations, be it in the fight against desertification, in education, in the struggle against endemic disease or other spheres.

The volunteers who are thus participating in the human development of Burkina Faso come from non-governmental organizations, community organizations, civil society and a range of bilateral and international volunteer organizations such as the United States Peace Corps, the European Volunteers for Development, the Canadian volunteers organization, the German Development Service, the Italian volunteers organization, the Japanese volunteers organization, the Volontaires français du progrès and the United Nations Volunteers. I take this opportunity to reiterate our great appreciation for their wonderful work in Burkina Faso, and to thank them deeply.

The range of these volunteers is a clear reflection of the concern — even the preference — felt for my country. That explains why Burkina Faso wished to mark the International Year of Volunteers by establishing a national study and organizing committee, working within a plan of action that draws on the cultural wealth of Burkina Faso and on its role as a social and cultural crossroads in order to create opportunities to recognize volunteer work, to create volunteer networks and to expand volunteerism, especially at the national level.

We expect the International Year of Volunteers to yield results that will enable the international community to grow ever more aware of the realities concerning all the facets of volunteerism with a view to providing better follow-up.

We reaffirm our wholehearted support for this type of humanitarian cooperation; that support is once again reflected in our sponsorship of draft resolution A/56/L.27, entitled "Recommendations on support for volunteering".

Mr. Heinbecker (Canada) (*spoke in French*): The tragic events of recent months have reminded us of the need for solidarity and cooperation among citizens and among States. They have also brought into sharp focus the tremendous generosity and devotion of thousands of individuals, not only here in this city but elsewhere in the world as well. These are the acts of selfless altruism which we are celebrating today as we gather to mark International Volunteer Day and the close of the International Year of Volunteers.

In November 1997, resolution 52/17, proclaiming 2001 the International Year of Volunteers, launched a host of activities demonstrating support for voluntarism, both within the United Nations family and on the part of numerous Governments and organizations. These myriad initiatives helped achieve the four goals of the International Year of Volunteers: enhanced recognition, facilitation, promotion and networking of volunteers.

(*spoke in English*)

Throughout the Year, the United Nations Volunteers programme, observing a tradition dating back more than 30 years, took the helm by supporting national committees, disseminating information on voluntarism, soliciting the participation of volunteers and seeking recognition for the work they perform all over the world. In particular, I would like to single out Sharon Capeling-Alakija, Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers programme, for her leadership. Canada is proud to call her one of our own.

To express our gratitude to the United Nations and to the United Nations Volunteers programme and its thousands of volunteers working in nearly 150 countries, earlier today Canada donated a commemorative sculpture which will find a home at United Nations Volunteers headquarters in Bonn. The sculpture symbolizes the enduring spirit of the International Year of Volunteers.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General, who in August submitted an exhaustive report to the General Assembly (A/56/288) highlighting the many different facets of volunteer work. The report underscores the contribution of voluntarism to social and economic development in developed and developing countries alike. It recognizes that

voluntarism must be seen as an important part of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and social integration, and in particular at overcoming social exclusion and discrimination.

In that regard, the draft resolution before us today in document A/56/L.27 is very much in keeping with the Secretary-General's report. Canada is proud to be among the sponsors, and is grateful to Japan and the Netherlands for their leadership in preparing the text of the draft resolution, as well as to the various members of the core group of countries for their own contributions. By adopting the draft resolution, the General Assembly will be expressing its appreciation to all those who devote their time, energy and talents to the welfare of others. There is no better way of caring.

In Canada, the International Year of Volunteers 2001 invited citizens, organizations and businesses to stand up and be counted. And they stood up; and they were counted. In 2000, just over 6.5 million Canadians gave of their time and talents, asking nothing in return. More than one quarter of all working-age Canadians volunteered. Those volunteers came from all different walks of life and segments of the Canadian population, but they were all rich in human spirit. In 2000, volunteers contributed an average of 162 hours each. In all, that translates into slightly more than one billion hours, or the equivalent of 549,000 full-time jobs.

This voluntarism took many different forms, such as accountants sitting on public committees, grandmothers babysitting toddlers, 10-year-olds visiting senior citizens, scout leaders organizing camps and activities for neighbourhood kids, retired teachers providing literacy education, people taking in their friends and relatives when calamities such as an Ottawa ice storm hit, office employees organizing a Christmas meal for the homeless, and so on.

A similarly long list of factors explains why volunteers give of their time, including solidarity with the less fortunate, the acquisition of skills, allegiance to a religion or community, and simple service to their own communities. Voluntarism is the most fundamental act of citizenship and philanthropy we can perform in our own societies and abroad.

In June 2000 the Government of Canada joined with the voluntary sector to launch the Voluntary Sector Initiative. The partnership has already borne fruit. It has helped small and large organizations across the country to recognize the achievements of volunteers. We have also produced a new national survey of giving, volunteering and participating, which will be the basis for policy research and policy making. The next survey, in 2003, will provide a further set of observations. And just today, the Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, announced several key elements of the Voluntary Sector Initiative, the most important being an accord between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector. That landmark accord, jointly developed and widely consulted upon across Canada, is built upon shared values, principles and commitments to guide a new relationship. It is an important step in the ongoing work to improve the quality of life in our own country and abroad, and it provides a foundation for the work of the Government and the voluntary sector in the future.

As a legacy of the International Year of Volunteers, the Prime Minister also announced the creation of the Canada Voluntarism Initiative to recognize, encourage and support volunteering in Canada. The goal of the initiative is to help people come together to strengthen communities and improve our quality of life through volunteering and other forms of civic participation. At the same time, funding was announced for the development of a Satellite Account of Non-profit Institutions and Volunteering within Statistics Canada's System of National Accounts. This Satellite Account will provide a picture of the contributions of the voluntary sector to the economy. We are working with other countries within the United Nations on a protocol that would permit international comparisons.

In Canada we are proud of the relationship we have enjoyed over the years with the voluntary sector. The Voluntary Sector Initiative is a recognition of the importance the Canadian Government attaches to the voluntary sector. Steps to stimulate this sector, to create the conditions favourable to its growth, not only help the direct beneficiaries of these good works but also reward those who practice them and, finally, enrich society as a whole.

Ms. Crowley (Australia): Australia has a long history of volunteers and volunteering, covering a wide variety of fields of work and human endeavour. We have been world leaders in some of these areas, and we have been willing partners, or active participants, with others in different areas. So it was from a rich base that

Australia participated in the International Year of Volunteers.

The year's activities were coordinated at the national level by the Department of Family and Community Services. Individual state governments also coordinated their own programmes of activities across Australia. The national programme included funding to community and voluntary sectors, sponsorship and partnerships, a communication strategy and research. The Australian programme was in keeping with the draft resolution on recommendations on support for volunteering, which the General Assembly is considering today. The draft resolution and its recommendations raise a number of very important points, and many of these have special resonance for Australia.

In the opening paragraphs, the document recognizes the importance and valuable contribution of traditional forms of mutual aid, self-help and civic participation to the economic and social development of communities. It further recognizes that volunteerism is an important part of strategies to reduce poverty and to provide health care, health services, disaster prevention and sustainable development.

In Australia, there is a long history of "pitching in and getting it done", whether that is fighting a bush fire, looking for a lost child in the bush or rushing in to help at the time of a disaster, like a cave-in at a work site or a mountain collapse in snow country. Australia also has a reputation for lending a hand overseas, especially when it is in an area of our expertise — for example, fighting fires — and Australians have gone to other countries very recently to do just that.

Australia has seen the creation of some international non-profit charitable organizations, like Apex and Meals on Wheels. It has an illustrious reputation in the area of charities — whether religious or other — and national and international non-governmental organizations, and thousands of Australians regularly give time to help in the work those organizations do.

There are a number of points in the question of volunteers that are very important and need to be a matter for ongoing consideration.

First, as recognized in the draft resolution, is the different level of male and female volunteers, in particular the high participation of women in the voluntary sector. This is based on a number of historical factors. Much of the essential work is known as "women's work" — nursing, caring, cooking, washing, reading, listening, bringing comfort and so on. Further, women have in the past not had the same opportunity to participate in the paid work force in the same numbers as men.

Secondly, precisely because they were at the coalface of life, women were often the first to see a need in the community and to try to do something about it, whether that was by starting Meals on Wheels, as was done in my own state of South Australia in 1953 by a woman, Doris Taylor, herself in a wheelchair; or by opening shelters for the protection of women against violence, which happened across the world at about the same time as women became politically active and discovered that they could effect change. This point is recognized in the draft resolution where it notes the "potential positive effect of volunteering on the empowerment of women". It is also important to note that there is a very long list of contributions by men through the voluntary sector. I am not here to cause a divide between men and women. The experience of recent weeks in this very city, and the work being done at ground zero and in the support systems to back that work, give powerful evidence of the fact that men are great volunteers too.

Thirdly, volunteers expand the work of government, especially in bringing services to people and through the work of other services — for example, by raising money for all sorts of good works, from research to playground equipment. This is done through partnership arrangements, as reflected in the United Nations approach to the International Year, and in the draft resolution we consider today. Partnerships were also a key element of the Australian Government's response to the Year, which included establishing partnerships with both the public and private sectors to provide a national conference and environmental projects, among others.

The draft resolution refers to another point of great importance, and that is that volunteers must not be used to replace paid employment. As history shows, there is a tradition of need being discovered and then met by the voluntary sector in the first instance, then being taken over by paid workers. A very good example of this is teaching, now largely in the hands of paid laypeople, whereas before, many children were taught by religious orders at little to no cost to the

community. It is important that the temptation to reverse that tradition be resisted. What is necessary is to support and encourage volunteers as a vital part of our communities, especially encouraging the opportunity for people to put back a little bit into their own community.

Adequate recognition will perpetuate the place of volunteers in our communities and encourage them to continue their efforts. In acknowledgement of this, the Australian Government included a communications programme in its activities, and the United Nations also promoted the concept of recognition as one vital element of the Year. It is fitting, therefore, that one of the recommendations we will adopt today encourages the media to participate in public awareness and the promotion of volunteers.

While promoting volunteers, our communities very often overlook the great generosity of our young people, sometimes described as "the selfish generation". Those very same young people spend their summers in camps helping children, including those with disability; they journey overseas to live very modestly in aid projects and lend their efforts to help those communities. Young people are full of energy and keen to find places and projects that allow them to give something back to their world. We must ensure that their contributions are recognized and encouraged. It is important that the altruism of youth not go to waste.

The draft resolution recognizes the need to promote volunteering and the values that go with it. There is also a need to recognize just how much work is done by volunteers and how much our communities depend on them. Such recognition reinforces the necessity of providing support for such workers, whether that support is through training, subsidies to organizations or, for example, travel costs.

It also reinforces the necessity for communities to reappraise this work from time to time, to be sure that volunteers are not doing what should properly be done in the paid work sector, either public or private. Volunteering has become associated with different activities over time, and indeed, it is still evolving. As the draft resolution states, there is not one universal model of best practice. What works well in one country may not work at all in another.

The approach taken by the Australian Government, and reflected in the recommendations we will adopt today, has been to create an enabling environment to allow volunteering to develop and flourish and to continue to add value to our communities. It is an approach that has been recognized throughout the United Nations Year and will be endorsed again in the resolution we will adopt today. The United Nations itself provides a model example of an enabling environment, through the United Nations Volunteers programme.

In managing the valuable resource and contribution of volunteers, whether in any one country or internationally, the challenge is to get the balance right. The great generosity of people ought to be fostered, encouraged and appreciated. At the same time, those very qualities of generosity and coping in the face of awful hardship ought not to be abused or exploited. Volunteers must be a part of the programme, working in partnership with the public and private sector for a better world.

Mrs. Rivero (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay wishes to join in the celebration of this day that marks the end of the International Year of Volunteers and the simultaneous beginning of a new phase in the development of volunteerism, which we hope will be even more beneficial than it has been thus far. In particular, we wish to express appreciation for the work carried out by the United Nations Volunteers, whose effective assistance and advice were available before and during the current year. In addition, we wish to stress the usefulness of the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/56/288 and hope that its recommendations will continue to be implemented in future phases.

In Uruguay, there are approximately 5,000 active organizations composed of volunteers from groups of various ages and all economic and social sectors. They participate on a daily basis in various activities related to human development. Following what has been to a certain extent the traditional development of volunteerism, the work of volunteers in Uruguay arose also in connection with social action by non-governmental organizations, but in recent years the Government, aware of the important work and the great contribution that volunteers make, has been participating to an even greater extent in activities aimed at solving problems that concern both civil society and the public sphere.

Accordingly, the Government of Uruguay, sharing the very important objectives that gave rise to the proclamation of 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers, and wishing to make its own contribution with the recognition and promotion of the work of volunteers, declared, through national decree 364 of 5 December 2000 that all of the domestic activities and programmes carried out during that year were of national importance. Accordingly, close cooperation was established between the Institute of Communication and Development of Uruguay, which, appropriately, was designated by the United Nations Volunteers programme as a focal point and was responsible for setting up a national committee, and public agencies — for example, the Ministries of Labour, Social Security, Education and Culture, Sports and Youth, on the one hand, and various non-governmental organizations, on the other hand, which, from the very beginning of the preparations for the Year, worked tirelessly to jointly carry out the activities planned for this celebration.

For all of these reasons, Uruguay is very happy to have participated directly and intensively in the commemoration of this International Year of Volunteers and of having been able to provide to the youngest members of its society a wealth of experience which, once again, shows that we, the peoples united, can achieve everything we set out to achieve.

Mr. Adam (Israel): The International Year of Volunteers, which draws to a close today, is only the beginning of increased volunteerism in the future: it gave us all an opportunity to learn the importance of and the need for volunteers and raised our awareness of their importance.

Israel is pleased to join with other countries in sponsoring draft resolution A/56/L.27, entitled "Recommendations on support for volunteering". At this time, I would like to commend the work of the United Nations Volunteers on its preparations for this Year and for the special events that were held. I would also like to commend the United Nations Secretariat on the promotion of programmes and projects aimed at providing substantive content in this regard. Israel also would like to commend the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations funds and programmes that placed cooperation with volunteers at the forefront of their efforts. In fact, all of this would not have been possible were it not for the 4,500 volunteers who worked around the clock, in difficult conditions and mostly in developing countries, coordinating the work of millions of volunteers around the world.

Israel is of the view that United Nations peacekeeping operations should enhance cooperation with the United Nations Volunteers, with a view towards increasing the number of volunteers working in the framework of peacekeeping operations, both in their civilian projects, be it in assisting in elections or capacity-building, or in the context of peace-building and preventive actions in areas of tension.

Israel is proud to have been a part of the International Year of Volunteers. Indeed, the whole notion of volunteerism is one that touches profoundly on Jewish values of charity and concern for one's neighbour. The concept of Tikkun Olam — literally "to fix the world", but more commonly understood as social justice — is an idea that has been central to Jewish people for centuries and that inspires untold acts of charity and kindness in countless Jewish communities around the world. These values have been integral not only to the Jewish people, but also to the State of Israel since its inception.

As is noted in our information kit, which was prepared for today's event and which can be found in the back of the Hall, the institutions on which the State of Israel was established were primarily volunteer organizations, including Israel's pre-State school system, the Hagannah (the precursor to the Israel Defence Forces), and the kibbutz movement, whose collective spirit and voluntary communal effort is a model to the world. It is the spirit of giving oneself for the sake of others that was vital to the early development, and the continued strength, of the State of Israel.

With the establishment of our State in 1948, many of the services that were once performed by volunteer organizations were taken over by the Government, and the focus of those organizations began to shift towards more social welfare-oriented activities. Volunteers were at the forefront of national efforts to assist in the absorption of hundreds of thousands of immigrants, many of them refugees from Nazi Germany, who suffered from severe emotional and psychological wounds. Today, that spirit of helping newcomers and the disadvantaged continues to thrive in programs like Perach, which matches up university students with disadvantaged children, and through the

numerous immigrant assistance programmes that have sprouted up in the wake of massive influxes of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

The spirit of volunteerism extends far beyond just the immigrant sector. The overwhelming majority of Israelis today perform some form of national service after completing high school. For some, their service is in the armed forces. But many others do national service in other important ways, from working in hospitals and nursing homes and assisting in the development of towns and communities to serving as tutors and role models for disadvantaged youth. Today, 32 per cent of the adult population in Israel are volunteers of one kind or another.

Opportunities for volunteering abound in Israel. The list of Israeli volunteer organizations is quite long, but I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to three in particular. The first is Yad Sarah, "Sarah's hand", an organization established in 1976 to ease the plight of the sick, the disabled and the elderly by lending medical equipment free of charge and by providing transportation and other medical services. More than 6,000 volunteers serve approximately 250,000 Israelis each year through Yad Sarah.

The second is Magen David Adom, Israel's equivalent of the Red Cross or the Red Crescent, which dates back to 1930. Approximately 6,000 people volunteer every day to help provide emergency first aid, operate blood banks and provide critical medical services.

The third organization is Hessed Shel Emmet, or, in English, "true kindness". This organization of 550 volunteers assists police in rescue operations after terrorist attacks and natural disasters by performing the unique task of collecting body parts and informing next of kin. This organization was recognized by the magazine *Colours*, a publication that is jointly produced by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) as part of the campaign to raise awareness of volunteering.

Indeed, volunteerism is very much a part of the Israeli ethic and is rooted in the words of the ancient Jewish sage known as Hillel, who said, "If I am only for myself, what kind of person am I?"

It is my delegation's sincere hope that the International Year of Volunteers will serve as inspiration for people all over the world to embrace the reality that no one is alone on this Earth, and that our actions, for good or bad, affect our communities, our countries and the whole world. We believe that the United Nations Year of Volunteers should be merely a starting point that will strengthen the role of volunteerism in the work of the world Organization and its subsidiary bodies.

We are hopeful that through this year's renewal of the spirit of volunteerism, individuals and societies the world over will be inspired to give a small piece of themselves for the betterment of all of humanity.

Mr. Lee Ho-jin (Republic of Korea): First of all, my delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report in document A/56/288 on the contribution of volunteerism as well as on ways Governments and the United Nations system can further support it. We also appreciate the efforts of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and its Executive Coordinator, who have been central in making 2001, the United Nations International Year of Volunteers (IYV), very fruitful. Furthermore, the initiative of the Governments of Japan and the Netherlands to adopt the relevant General Assembly and Commission for Social Development resolutions over the past years deserve particular recognition.

At the opening ceremony of IYV 2001, held at United Nations Headquarters in November 2000, the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, remarked "At the heart of volunteerism are the ideals of service and solidarity and the belief that together we can make the world better. In that sense, we can say that volunteerism is the ultimate expression of what the United Nations is all about." In this regard, the launching of IYV 2001 could be considered a new beginning for all of our common endeavours to make this a better world.

The strength of volunteerism is a key measure of how healthy and giving a society is. Volunteers share not only difficult tasks that have to be accomplished but also, and perhaps more importantly, the sense of giving and togetherness that strengthens the social fabric. They exemplify the noblest form of the human spirit in times of crisis and challenge. The point was powerfully brought home by the spontaneous outpouring of volunteers to help out in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. It is only appropriate that we take this day to honour and remember all the volunteers working in many corners

of the world, in many cases risking their own lives and well-being in situations of natural disasters and armed conflict. Their safety and unhindered access to the people they aim to serve should be ensured.

In the course of IYV 2001, 123 national, 75 state and six city IYV committees representing civil society, government, academia and the news media have been working together to promote, facilitate and establish networks for volunteer activities worldwide. The collaboration should continue and further expand, even beyond the year of IYV 2001.

The Government of the Republic of Korea is firmly committed to promoting volunteerism in society. Since the Korean IYV National Committee was launched in July last year, several initiatives have been advanced, such as the opening of the IYV 2001 Korean web site, a comprehensive survey of public perceptions regarding volunteerism, a national IYV conference and a torch relay to link up a nationwide network of volunteer programmes. Currently, we are in the process of enacting a law that will strengthen administrative and financial support to volunteer activities.

The activities are wholly in line with the importance we place on international volunteerism. We have been contributing to the Republic of Korea-UNV Trust Fund since 1986, as well as dispatching an increasing number of Korean volunteers to take part in various UNV activities. Korean overseas volunteers are also being trained and sent to many countries by the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). Next year in September, the seventeenth biennial world conference on volunteerism, organized by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), is to be held in Seoul under the theme "Volunteering: the power of civil society — a bridge to reconciliation and peace". We hope the conference will further strengthen the momentum to consolidate the spirit and work of volunteerism around the world.

The International Year of Volunteers, 2001 has greatly enhanced global public awareness of the importance of volunteerism. As the Secretary-General's report points out, there is an evolving paradigm that underscores the reciprocity in the benefits of volunteerism to everyone involved, as well as the social participation that voluntary action offers to the poor and other needy people in society.

The hardware for volunteerism is also changing. With the help of information technology, volunteer activities have extended to the Internet. Limited to offering on-the-scene services in the past, volunteers can now do their work at a distance as well. They help people in remote countries to disseminate their valuable experience and knowledge in agriculture, environmental protection, reforestation and health and medical care, while making the most of the existing networks in the fields. In the future, when video conference facilities become easily accessible to the public, online volunteering should greatly expand the social capital that can be utilized to help the needy sectors of society. In this context, we have great expectations for the Secretary-General's UNITeS initiative, as outlined in his millennium report.

As the representative of Japan said this morning, the Republic of Korea and Japan will be joining hands to co-host the 2002 World Cup soccer championship in June next year. My delegation is equally delighted by the opportunity to co-host that global celebration of the game of soccer. My Government is doing its very best to prepare for a most successful and enjoyable World Cup and will be relying upon the selfless services of countless volunteers to make it happen. Indeed, we expect the 2002 World Cup to be a milestone event for the promotion of volunteerism worldwide.

As the International Year of Volunteers comes to a close, the United Nations must gather, analyse and distribute the information and lessons learned so that volunteer activities can be further supported at the national, regional and international levels.

In the effort to strengthen and solidify volunteer activities, the United Nations Volunteers programme has been instrumental in organizing seminars and expert working groups, as well as in establishing the worldwide network of national committees and providing the committees with technical assistance. Hopefully, the experience has helped to lay the foundation for the national committees to function on a permanent basis.

Love of humanity and societal maturity require that we continue to encourage and rally behind the volunteer movement. The Government of the Republic of Korea is firmly committed to this noble cause.

Mr. Singhara Na Ayudhaya (Thailand): Allow me at the outset to express Thailand's appreciation to the United Nations and Member countries, whose initiatives and active participation have brought the cause and value of volunteerism and voluntary

activities to the fore. The International Year of Volunteers offers a rare opportunity for us all to give special recognition to volunteerism, especially to the organizations and to the people behind them. The International Year is an invitation to re-examine the ways in which society undervalues volunteering. It reflects the urgency of the need to salvage and revitalize the spirit of volunteerism.

In this connection, it is high time to re-examine policy orientation and strategies on volunteerism. Volunteering has had a crucial role to play, both in times of peace and of war. Volunteerism sensitizes institutions and, more than ever, could serve as a powerful tool to connect people and strengthen society towards democratization and good governance.

However, before volunteerism can be integrated into national strategies to overcome poverty and social exclusion and to enable a country to sustain political, economic and social development, it will have to handle the challenge of reviving social fabrics, the spirit of reciprocity, a stronger sense of mutual trust and social cohesiveness.

Voluntary work has been a way of life in Thailand since the agrarian society of olden days, when the process of rice farming — ranging from sowing, ploughing, reaping to grain refining — involved volunteer labour from nearby neighbourhoods. The culture of interdependency was well defined by the culture of the rice-growing society. However, at a time when globalization is at our doorstep, many fundamental and crucial agrarian values in society have gradually withered away. At this point in time, volunteering can assume diverse functions and help weave the loose fabrics back into one piece of tapestry. Volunteerism has become more relevant than ever to modern society in Thailand due to its functional and catalytic role in connecting people and in helping to overcome social exclusion.

In the present situation, in which resources for development seem to be more scarce than ever and countries are faced with many daunting challenges, the mobilization of community support through grass-roots volunteering is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty and to attain self-sufficiency. In its awareness of the value of volunteering, based on a great wealth of experience and contributions from a number of non-profit organizations and civil societies, Thailand has dedicated its efforts to supporting the work of volunteers.

On the legislative front, a more concrete way of supporting volunteer work in Thailand will be through the proposed law on social welfare, which seeks to facilitate the work of volunteers through the deregulation of rules and other restrictions that impede the operation of non-governmental organizations and, more significantly, through the provision of support for registered non-profit organizations whose work benefits the public. The Parliament and the National State Council are now considering the draft law. Also in the pipeline is a law to protect and support volunteers so as to provide more incentives for people to become volunteers. The public and private sectors will also be engaged in promoting the administrative management of volunteer work to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

Pending the passage of such laws and in order to strengthen the network of civil societies, the Thai Government has facilitated the establishment of a national non-governmental organization coordinating centre for development and of provincial non-governmental organization coordinating centres on development in 75 provinces nationwide for currently 9 million volunteers in Thailand.

To demonstrate our commitment to supporting volunteer work, Thailand announced, on 21 October 2001, the Declaration on Thai Volunteers. Thai Volunteers Day is dedicated to commemorating the devotion of the late Princess Sri Nakarindra, the Princess Mother to His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand.

The Princess Mother was much revered as the "Mother of Social Welfare and Volunteering" because of her recognized long-standing service to vulnerable people in the remotest areas of Thailand. In 1954 she formed a group of volunteers comprising medical doctors and nurses in mobile units to provide medical services to those with little or no access to such services. The Foundation of the Volunteer Medical Team of the Princess Mother is still performing the same work today with a more advanced network in 50 provinces. Its work has helped improve the quality of life of people in rural areas.

In the context of achieving social development for all in a globalizing world, Thailand has identified the marginalized groups who live in dire poverty and

urgently need a social assistance programme as a first priority. A decentralization of power has also been put in place to ensure that local administrations and populations take charge of their own natural resources and budgets, including in the areas of public facilities and infrastructure. However, the financial crisis of 1997 and the imminent global economic downturn today, coupled with the many adverse effects of disparity of economic development, have increased the number of people living in poverty in Thailand to more than 10 million in 2001.

It seems that although we have travelled very far, there remains a long and arduous road ahead of us. We believe that by strengthening society at the grass-roots level, including through volunteerism, we would be in a better position to address the shortcomings of economic development and to revitalize society. Volunteers are a valuable asset of our society with a great wealth of experience and skills to contribute to the efforts of the government sector.

Although today marks the end of the International Year of Volunteers, 2001, the spirit of volunteerism will live on in our hearts. For its part, Thailand would like to join the other members of the international community in making volunteerism a culture of our globalized world.

Ms. van Glaanenweygel (Suriname): Having been involved in the preparatory process for the International Year of Volunteers, the Surinamese delegation is honoured and privileged to address the General Assembly today, on the occasion of the International Day of Volunteers and the closing of the International Year of Volunteers, 2001. It is an even greater honour that this is the first time in history that the General Assembly has devoted two meetings to the significance of the work of volunteers for the development of peoples and countries.

The Surinamese delegation attaches great importance to the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Support for volunteering". We thank the Secretary-General, in particular, for the view expressed in resolution 39/2 of the report of the Commission for Social Development (E/2001/26), as cited in part I of document A/56/288:

> "Volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction, sustainable development and social integration, in particular overcoming social exclusion and discrimination."

Therefore, we support and sponsor the draft resolution of Japan and the Netherlands entitled "Recommendations on support for volunteering".

In Suriname, as part of our upbringing, we are taught from a young age to help one another. Volunteerism is thus part of our culture and considered to be very important. The National Committee on the International Year of Volunteers was therefore invited to discuss the issue and the actions being undertaken by the Committee with the President of the Republic of Suriname. The installation of our National Committee on the International Year of Volunteers was preceded by consultations with national volunteer organizations.

On 5 December 2000 the National Committee officially launched the International Year of Volunteers by holding a one-day workshop with the theme "Volunteerism for a Caring Society", at which our First Lady, who is a very active volunteer, and various international guests were present. These international guests also participated in the Model United Nations Assembly, organized by the United Nations Association Suriname on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Republic of Suriname's membership in the United Nations, on 4 December 2000.

The following groups and organizations participated in the International Year of Volunteers Suriname (IYV Suriname): youth, the elderly, women, men, the disabled, the Red Cross, the private sector, trade unions, service clubs, environmental organizations, the United Nations Association, human rights organizations and the Surinamese Government. To promote volunteerism in Suriname, various activities were organized, including radio programmes and a marathon, which was entitled Volunteerism, a Worthy Cause. IYV Suriname also started a volunteer centre as a sound basis for future activities.

Volunteers and volunteer organizations offer a great contribution to the development of my country. Our Government therefore greatly values the true partnership between governmental and non-governmental organizations. The National Committee on the International Year of Volunteers in Suriname will officially close the International Year of Volunteers in Paramaribo this evening with a special ceremony in which certificates of appreciation will be

awarded to various volunteers who have offered their services to their fellow human beings and society.

This morning's special closing meeting on the International Year of Volunteers has meant a lot to us. We congratulate the speakers on their statements and artists on their performance, and thank them all for their valuable contributions. It is true that volunteerism makes a difference in our daily lives.

We also thank IYV Suriname and all Surinamese volunteers for their efforts and contributions. In addition, we thank United Nations Volunteers for all the work it does in Suriname and for supporting our National Committee on the International Year of Volunteers. The United Nations Volunteers have been crucial in promoting the Year.

Finally, we thank the Secretary-General for his dedication and work on volunteerism. Indeed, a better, safer world for all needs volunteerism.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Ms. DeKuyper (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): Before beginning my official remarks this afternoon, I would like to take a moment to make a personal comment.

About 50 years ago, I went on my first school field trip and came across the Hudson River from New Jersey to the United Nations, a fledgling organization. I sat in the visitors' gallery and watched the debate. I am sorry that I cannot remember what the subject matter was, but it seemed so very important and I am sure it was. I wondered how the obviously very important people got to speak and, in truth, I was awed by it all.

Today, I am still in part that little girl and I still am in awe of being in these halls. And look — I am up here, speaking to the General Assembly as a volunteer on a subject to which I have dedicated my life: volunteerism.

In 1862, after witnessing the horrendous human suffering on the battlefield in Solferino, Mr. Henry Dunant put forward the following idea in his book, *A Memory of Solferino*:

> "Would it not be possible ... to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers?"

Today, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement comprises 178 National Societies in countries spanning the world in a global, humanitarian network involving 97 million members and volunteers. That is a unique example of the force that can be created when you pair a vision of humanitarianism with the dedication of volunteers.

We all recognize that volunteers are the people who choose to give of their time, of their energy or of their knowledge to show solidarity with their fellow human beings. They are the countless people who reach out and support others, sometimes in response to great disasters, natural or man-made; sometimes in response to needs arising from an armed conflict or in response to unimaginable crimes, as we witnessed here in New York on 11 September.

Always, they are present in less visible situations in their communities and neighbourhoods, where they carry out myriad small tasks that, taken together, constitute a great work. On behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), I honour them and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

It is therefore a great honour for the IFRC to address this important meeting today on the day that brings the International Year of Volunteers, 2001 to a close. We would like to take the opportunity to give voice not only to our own movement, but also to the many other volunteer organizations all over the world. Every organization is different in pursuing its different missions, but uniting in one common denominator: volunteerism. These organizations are created by volunteers and, once created, they constitute a force to mobilize even more volunteers in the service of others.

The IFRC views the International Year of Volunteers as a success that will have an impact for years to come. As an international organization, we have joined with United Nations Volunteers in promoting the ideals of the Year. The success of this year and of our cooperation with United Nations Volunteers has increased the knowledge of volunteerism and raised it to a more visible platform. As a result, volunteering is better understood and appreciated.

This has an enormous impact on the value and work of volunteering. Governments have seen that their actions can have an impact on volunteering and that they have a responsibility to look at ways in which they can promote and facilitate volunteering. Through the promotion and networking of this Year, organizations have been inspired to improve their systems of management of and reward and recognition for volunteers and have come to better understand how to involve volunteers more effectively.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has paid particular and careful attention to using the opportunities available to it to promote and strengthen social development issues, particularly those relevant to the most vulnerable people in communities. We have sought during 2001, the International Year of Volunteers, to integrate the activities of the International Year with other programmes relevant to the vulnerable, especially vulnerable children, youth and older persons.

Our National Societies are volunteer organizations established in accordance with a country's situation, traditions and needs, while at the same time adhering to our commonly held seven fundamental principles, one of which is voluntary service. The principle states that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire of gain. The Societies mobilize members and volunteers at the national level to reach out and deliver local services. Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are local people helping other local people. Under the umbrella of the IFRC, these National Societies are united to form a strong international network capable of reaching out at the global, national and community levels to serve the most vulnerable communities across the planet.

Volunteer organizations cannot succeed alone. They need the support and cooperation of their Governments in order to develop in a volunteer-friendly environment. The way Governments, government agencies and politicians act regarding volunteering and voluntary organizations has a great impact on their viability and effectiveness. Governments can create enabling conditions for volunteering by promoting volunteerism and establishing a solid legal framework. Through dialogue with their volunteer organizations, Governments can successfully encourage a friendly environment for volunteering, which grows out of the local culture and conditions.

The International Federation has worked throughout this year to create a basis for this dialogue. We were delighted that the Inter-Parliamentary Union, at its 105th Statutory Conference in Havana in April 2000, adopted a decision encouraging Parliaments and the leading volunteer organizations in their countries to open dialogue on measures that might be taken to improve volunteerism. A number of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have already opened that dialogue and more will do so in the years ahead.

The International Federation would like to express its appreciation to the States Members of the United Nations for designating this year the International Year of Volunteers. For us, the International Year is the beginning of a new approach to volunteerism, especially with respect to contacts with Governments and entities beyond the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and we are looking forward to fruitful dialogue and cooperation with all the United Nations Member States in the future.

Five days from now, Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the United Nations will be presented with the well-deserved Nobel Peace Prize. Let me, on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo and Mr. Annan and allow me at the same time to remind us all that the very first Nobel Peace Prize was given 100 years ago to an outstanding volunteer, Mr. Henry Dunant, who lived his life as a humble person dedicated to the cause of relieving human suffering. His vision inspired the millions and millions of people who today constitute the power of humanity and who, as volunteers, serve their fellow human beings across the world.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 44/6 of 17 October 1989, I now call on the observer for the Council of Europe.

Mr. De Jonge (Council of Europe): It is an honour for me to address the General Assembly on International Volunteer Day. The Council of Europe has supported the United Nations International Year of Volunteers. This fits in perfectly well with the Council of Europe's overall concern to strengthen civil society as an expression of participatory democracy and to promote social cohesion.

Voluntary action involves learning, sharing and helping others, and it enables all citizens to play a part in the democratic process. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe therefore welcomed the United Nations initiative and called on the States members of the Council of Europe to adopt various incentive measures during the International Year of Volunteers at the national and the European level. To mark the beginning of the Year, the Parliamentary Assembly devoted a debate in January 2001 to the issue of improving the status and role of volunteers as a contribution by the Parliamentary Assembly to the International Year of Volunteers. A report on that item was submitted by the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Social, Health and Family Affairs, which has a long-standing tradition of supporting international voluntary service.

In a recommendation to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, based on that report, the Parliamentary Assembly called on States members of the organization, among other things, to eliminate from their laws and their practice all obstacles preventing people from engaging in voluntary action and to promote dynamic policies favouring such action. That text and the report were prepared in close cooperation with the European team of the United Nations Volunteers. The Parliamentary Assembly invited Governments to recognize the democratic, humanitarian, social, educational, training and economic value of voluntary action.

I might single out a few other proposals. The Parliamentary Assembly asked Governments to help, particularly by earmarking budgetary and other resources, to support and develop voluntary initiatives of value to the community. The Parliamentary Assembly also urged voluntary associations and volunteers themselves to respect the values and principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the Parliamentary Assembly asked Governments to give voluntary workers legal status and adequate social protection, while respecting their independence and removing financial obstacles to volunteering.

For its part, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe drew up the European Convention on the Promotion of a Transnational Long-term Voluntary Service for Young People. The Convention is intended to be a tool to facilitate, promote and support transnational voluntary service for young people up to the age of 25. By its terms, young people should receive preparation and training for voluntary activities, as well as proper recognition. That instrument, which was opened for signature in May 2000, is also open to States not members of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the Council of Europe has taken the initiative to draw up a code of ethics for young volunteers.

The United Nations International Year of Volunteers was a timely initiative, and it threw the spotlight on those Council of Europe initiatives. The contribution of the Council of Europe to the Year was aimed at favouring the development of a genuine culture of voluntary action necessarily extending to the Council of Europe itself as well as to its member States and to volunteers. However, our initiatives in support of the Year, and in particular the Parliamentary Assembly's recommendation and the Council of Europe Convention to which I just referred, could also be of interest and value to States not members of the Council of Europe and to other organizations.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/56/L.27, entitled "Recommendations on support for volunteering", as orally revised.

Before the Assembly proceeds to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that since the introduction of the draft resolution the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/56/L.27: Albania, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Paraguay, the Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Uruguay.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/56/L.27, as orally revised?

Draft resolution A/56/L.27, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 56/38).

The Acting President: Before calling on those who wish to speak in explanation of position on the draft resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation wishes at the outset to thank the delegations of Japan and of the Netherlands for their efforts in preparing the draft resolution entitled "Recommendations on support for volunteering", which has just been adopted under agenda item 108. My delegation wants to affirm its support for that draft resolution, which was adopted by consensus, and to stress the importance we attach to the content of the text, which promotes volunteering.

Nevertheless, we want to draw the attention of Member States to the fact that, in our view, the resolution does not cover all areas related to volunteering, specifically the issue of the safety and security of volunteers in time of war or conflict. Volunteers in Kuwait made a great effort to help Kuwaiti civilians during the 1990 occupation of Kuwait. Important volunteer services included the provision of food, medicine and medical services to civilians, particularly women, children and the elderly, who were then under occupation. Those volunteers exposed themselves to danger owing to the military operations then under way.

My delegation thus believes it important that, in future consideration of this item, we should pay due attention to the issue of the safety and security of volunteers in time of war or conflict.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 108.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.